



## LIBERAL ARTS

### Technical Writers and the Gender Gap: Trending Discussions and Disparities

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Recent efforts to increase women's participation in science and technology have gained widespread attention, especially in the scholarship, mentoring, and specific offices geared toward recruiting and retaining women in STEM. Although technical writers permeate the STEM fields, gender gaps among them have been left out of this conversation. Gender issues in STEM may impact other affiliated fields like technical writing in ways previously unimagined, because subject matter experts in both disciplines work together closely.

Our research has been data-driven and has two phases: a statistical analysis of employment trends in the field and a keyword analysis of how academic and practitioner journals discuss gender in technical writing. An examination of the employment statistics in technical writing shows that gender gaps are widening, especially for part-time writers. At the same time, an analysis of keywords in the titles of peer-reviewed technical

communication journals shows that scholarly discussions do not address these statistics. Published scholarship tends to address academic and historical women's issues rather than workplace and practical experiences. The combination of these data reveals an opening for further research on how female technical writers who work in male-dominated industries are able to successfully navigate the complex gender dynamic. More broadly, research on the nature of possible strains on both men and women in fields such as STEM and technical writing where gender imbalances exists could be extrapolated to offer practical solutions in these industries. These solutions might include innovative mentoring strategies for technical communicators, which could also benefit STEM subject matter experts.

*Research advisor Jennifer Bay notes, "This research opens up possible interdisciplinary collaborations with STEM fields, particularly how the mentoring that women receive in STEM disciplines may be useful for women in non-STEM careers. Future research will address how workplace success might be influenced by how we can educate non-STEM students to understand gender dynamics."*

Overmyer, T. (2013). Technical writers and the gender gap: Trending discussions and disparities. *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research*, 3, 98-99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284315176>